

STOREFRONT for Art & Architecture

For Immediate Release

THE NEW AMERICAN GHETTO

EXHIBITION

November 6-December 21, 1991

Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 12-6pm

Opening Reception: November 6th, 6-8pm

at

STOREFRONT for Art and Architecture

97 Kenmare Street (near Lafayette), New York, NY 10012

SLIDE PRESENTATION (on going)

November 1-December 3, 1991

Gallery Hours: Monday-Friday 11-5, Saturday 12-5

at

The Municipal Art Society's Urban Center Gallery III,

457 Madison Avenue (51 st. Street), New York, NY 10022

THE NEW AMERICAN GHETTO is a multi-media exhibition to show the emergence of new kind of ghettos that are currently taking shaping in major American cities today. These "new ghettos," which combine physical destruction with social fragmentation, are shattering our conventional view of urban poverty. With conditions that are far more complex and diverse than the housing projects, these "new ghettos" are shaped by the homelessness, drugs, crime, mental illness, alcoholism and other social conditions that have come to threaten the social fabric during the last two decades. Instituted by short-sighted political decisions, and physically isolated and removed from the main frameworks of the society, the "new ghettos" are pockets of abandonments and destitutions, for both communities and individuals.

Based on the "Ruins and Revivals Archive" by photo-journalist Camilo Jose Vergara, 15 years of documentation and 8,000 color slides of urban decays, **THE NEW AMERICAN GHETTO** is an exhibition to show documentations and analyses of the "new ghettos." The exhibition at STOREFRONT for Art and Architecture from **November 6th thru December 21**, will be comprised of two elements. The first element is a selection of Mr. Vergara's photographs, which will show the forms and manners of urban decay in cities that include Detroit, Chicago, Newark and New York. The second part will be various analyses of the urban, social and architectural condition of the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx, home to about 12,000 people. This analyses will be generated by 13 students at The Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation of Columbia University, under the supervision of professor Richard Plunz, in collaboration with Mr. Vergara, Leonard Hicks and Kyong Park, director of STOREFRONT for Art and Architecture. They will be presented in computer generated mappings (developed with the assistance of Eden Muir and Christo Tountas of the Architecture Computer Facility at Columbia University), studies of social and environmental issues, interviews, photographs and drawings. The exhibition will be a collage of images and text to give information and understanding of the structure and the life of Mott Haven.

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From **November 1 to December 3th**, there also will be an ongoing slide presentation of Mr. Vergara's documentation called **New American Ghetto: New York**, at the Urban Center in gallery III. Produced by the Municipal Art Society, this 10 minute slide presentation will provide a detailed explanation of what the "new ghetto" is, and how it has developed in New York City. The slides will be accompanied by a sound track, to provide an overview to the public of the locations which have been most dramatically effected, including Mott Haven, East New York and Brownsville in Brooklyn.

For the past two decades, Mott Haven has been the poorest Community Board in New York City, and one of the most drug-ridden neighborhoods in the nation. Being recently selected for the relocation of hundreds of homeless families, its south eastern section is the most developed of New York's "new ghettos." Two large new family shelters and a large outpatient mental health facilities are located there, along with a string of "medicare mills," two methadone clinics, and a women's shelter that operates on the fringes of the neighborhood. In brief, Mott Haven is a prime representation of the New American Ghetto.

THE NEW AMERICAN GHETTO is a response to the issues that are being raised by Mr. Vergara's documentation, and the questions evolving from communities being created under New York City's ten-year housing plan. This housing plan, which began in 1986, with a price tag of \$5.1 billion, is by far the most ambitious re-building effort of its kind in any American city. Fueled by the crisis of the homeless and the shortage of affordable housings during the 80's, which paradoxically was marked by a real estate boom in office buildings and luxury condominiums, the plan will undoubtedly shape the most destitute sections of New York City for decades to come. While the number of housing units being made available and their cost have attracted much attention, there is yet a critical examination required of its real effects on the communities involved this plan. Are these programs giving new life to these neighborhood? Or merely reinforcing the existing ghettos? Or creating new ones? And have they learned from the failures of previous housing projects?

Although the ten-year plan and its related programs can be credited with implementing some programs that will bring positive effects toward stronger neighborhood and communities, Mr. Vergara's documentation clearly shows the emergence of new ghettos that further poverty as a tradition in the American way of life. The ten-year plan, according to Mr. Vergara, not only fails to provide a workable long-range plan, it intensifies forces of poverty by throwing people in needs into the cores of decay, or injecting disabilities into the communities that are in need of supports. Thus, the purpose of **THE NEW AMERICAN GHETTO** is to bring the emergence and the conditions of "new ghettos" to our attention, and to generate critical discourse on social, urban and architectural issues that may ultimately shape our cities into the future.

For more information contact:

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